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ABSTRACT

Because of the significant numbers of high school graduates who require remediation upon entering colleges, it is recommended that colleges report to high schools on how well their graduates are prepared to handle college-level work and how these students performed during their first year of college. The college-readiness programs in eight states (Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Texas) are discussed and compared. The Tennessee Board of Regents program is considered promising, in that it provides detailed placement and assessment results to high school principals, district and school board administrators, state education officials, and legislators. Differences in the reporting process and type of information reported among the states with college-readiness reporting programs are discussed. Problems in making college-readiness reporting programs work are discussed, as are the factors that make a program work. (KM)

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Reporting to High Schools on Students' Readiness for College: An Idea Worth Developing

"The tie between our schools and colleges cannot be more obvious—neither could function without the other, and neither can be much better in quality than the other."

A Progress Report and Recommendations on Educational Improvements in the SREB States, SREB, 1987

- Colleges should tell high schools how well their graduates are prepared to handle college-level work and how these students performed during their first year of college.
- This information about students' readiness for college could be helpful to teachers and principals in:
  - — reinforcing their successful programs;
  - — upgrading less effective programs; and
  - — counseling students to improve their readiness for college.
- College faculty and their high school colleagues could jointly use the results of the college-readiness reporting programs to help students do better in both high school and college.
- Students could get a clearer picture of what is expected of them in college and the importance of learning certain skills in high school.
- In time, this process could result in more cooperation among high schools and colleges, better prepared high school students, and less remedial education in college.

Programs that help students become better prepared for college are clearly needed. Significant numbers of high school graduates now require remediation upon entering college. For example, in Florida, Georgia, and Tennessee, where statewide standards are used for placing students in college-level or remedial courses, about 40 percent of entering freshmen need some type of remedial instruction. These states are not unusual in the numbers of college students who need remedial education, they simply have a system that identifies the problem.

The more that high schools know about the academic strengths and weaknesses of their graduates, the better they can make the curricula and counseling to prepare future graduates for beginning college-level courses. Imagine the

College-Readiness Reporting Programs in the SREB States

	Established By	Institutions Involved
Florida	Legislative Mandate	All Public Colleges/Universities
Georgia	System Procedure	All Public Colleges/Universities
Louisiana	Legislative Mandate	All Public Colleges/Universities
Maryland	System Procedure	State Universities and College System
North Carolina	University Initiative	University of North Carolina System
South Carolina	Legislative Mandate	All Colleges/ Universities
Tennessee		
Board of Regents	Board Policy	University/Community College System
University of Tennessee	System Procedure	University of Tennessee System
Texas	Legislative Mandate	All Public Colleges/Universities

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potential for helping students if high school "X" finds that 40 of its 70 most recent graduates entering college required remedial reading and that those students showed particular weaknesses in drawing inferences from written paragraphs. Or if high school "Z" finds that 35 percent of its recent graduates who entered college after completing the college preparatory program showed difficulties in Algebra I and that none required remedial writing.

The idea of reporting to high schools on student readiness for college is straightforward—in fact, relatively simple. The benefits appear to be obvious and many. The concept seems

"Higher education should work closely with the public schools—informing each public school district of the collegiate performance of its graduates, especially the numbers requiring remedial work before placement in college-level study."

SREB, 1985

ideal for encouraging faculty in schools and colleges to work together. But there are problems in making this straightforward program work in the eight SREB states that are trying it. To begin with, the information is often reported to high schools in a way that is not very helpful. In those areas where the information as presented might be of help, the high schools may not be using it routinely. Or high schools and colleges may "go through the motions" but not be committed to using the results of college-readiness reports. A review of college-readiness reporting programs underway in several SREB states suggests that key steps are involved in making the programs effective.

The Tennessee Board of Regents' Program—A Promising Start

While there are problems in implementing college-readiness reporting programs, the Tennessee State Board of Regents' program shows promise for assisting high school students in preparing for college. The program was developed cooperatively by the Board of Regents, the Tennessee Board of Education, the Tennessee Department of Education, and the College Board. Entering college students are assessed based upon competencies identified in the College Board's Educational EQuality Project, which is designed to strengthen the quality of secondary education and promote equal opportunity for all students in higher education. All entering freshmen with American College Testing (ACT) program scores below a certain level are required to take a placement test to assess their readiness for beginning college-level work. Students whose scores do not indicate satisfactory skills in reading, writing, logical relationships, or mathematics are required to take remedial or developmental courses in the area(s) of weakness. The latest report from the Tennessee program shows that 12,325 students under 21 years of age entered the system's 20 institutions in the fall of 1987. Of that number, just over 6,500 students (53 percent) were enrolled in college-level courses only. The remaining 5,800 students (47 percent of the total) were enrolled in one or more remedial or developmental courses—at an average of two courses per student.

"Once college-readiness reports are distributed, there is little contact between higher education and the schools—which is, after, all what the programs are about."

The Tennessee Regents' program is unique in the detailed information it provides. The results of the assessment program, in varying levels of detail, are given to high school principals, district and school board administrators, state education officials, and legislators. The reports include individual student assessment and placement data (released only with the permission of each student), systemwide data, statewide group data from each college and university, group data for each high school from each Board of Regents' institution, group data for each high school from all Regents' institutions, and enrollment data. The reports not only identify the numbers and percentages of students required to take the placement test, but the numbers and percentages of students placed in remedial and developmental courses in each of the areas tested. The reports go one step further in identifying academic skill weaknesses within the major test areas. For example, within reading comprehension, average scores are given for the total test and for specific areas within the test—understanding main ideas, understanding direct statements, and drawing inferences. Mathematics is divided into three test areas (arithmetic skills, elementary algebra, and intermediate algebra), each of which further identifies specified skills. Suggestions for use of the information are also included as a part of the reports.

Understanding of the college-readiness information and its potential has been promoted through the Tennessee Collaborative for Educational Excellence. The collaborative was

"... about 40 percent of entering freshmen need some type of remedial instruction."

created three years ago with the assistance of the College Board to improve high school curricula, student preparation for college, and learning in public schools and higher education. Members of the collaborative include the Tennessee Board of Education (representing all K-12 public schools), the State Board of Regents (representing 20 collegiate institutions), the University of Tennessee system, and the College Board. In support of the process, sponsored workshops are held for district personnel to explain the reports and discuss their use to improve student preparation for college.

Average Scores of First-Time Freshmen Under 21 Years of Age on Tennessee Academic Assessment and Placement Program (AAPP) Tests

Tennessee Board of Regents' Institutions: All
High School: "X"

AAPP Test and Number of Questions	High School "X"			Percent of Questions Answered Correctly by Entering College Students from Tennessee
	Number of Students (15)	Average Number Answered Correctly	Percent of Questions Answered Correctly	
Arithmetic Skills: Total Score (35)		25.4	72.3%	73.1%
Operations with Whole Numbers (9 questions)		7.7	85.6	92.2
Operations with Fractions (10 questions)		7.0	70.0	67.0
Operations with Decimals and Percents (10 questions)		6.3	63.0	66.0
Applications Involving Computations (6 questions)		4.4	73.3	66.7

This table illustrates one section of a placement test report comparing students from one Tennessee high school to all students from Tennessee under 21 years of age entering the Tennessee Regents' system. Fifteen of high school "X" graduates had "low" scores on the mathematics portion of the ACT, which meant that they were required to take the arithmetic skills portion of the Tennessee AAPP test. High school "X" students had the most difficulty in answering questions relating to decimals and percents—just over 6 of 10 questions were answered correctly. Operations with whole numbers was their strongest area—nearly 8 of 9 answers were correct; this, however, was lower than the system average of 92.2 percent correct. Arithmetic skills is one test area reported to Tennessee's high schools; other areas include reading comprehension, writing, logical relationships, elementary algebra, and intermediate algebra.

College-Readiness Reports to High Schools Differ in Process and Results

Several other SREB states have implemented or are developing programs to report on the college readiness of high school graduates. The programs vary in the type of information reported and in the detail provided. Some involve state-level coordination; others rely on individual colleges and universities to report directly to the districts or high schools.

Maryland and South Carolina supply high schools with information on the first-year performance of students entering college. In **Maryland,** state university and college system staff report student data, by institution, to each high school (the students are not identified). The reports contain credit hours attempted and passed and the grade point average for each student. There are no summary reports.

South Carolina higher education institutions provide individual student transcripts to the high schools. Some colleges identify students by name; others do not. High schools may be able to recognize remedial/developmental courses because of the titles, but colleges do not clearly identify these courses. High schools forward summary information to the State Department of Education where statewide reports are prepared. These reports are sent to district superintendents routinely and to high school principals upon individual request.

Most SREB states that have developed college-readiness reporting programs provide both college placement and performance information to high schools on their graduates. **Florida's** 9 state universities and 28 community colleges

send individual student transcripts to the state's 300 high schools; there is little or no group data provided. The reports also indicate whether students were referred to remedial or developmental programs.

The Georgia University System reports systemwide and high school group performance and placement information to high schools; individual student and institutional information is not supplied. The reports include the number and percentage of entering freshmen and of developmental students, and the mean high school grade point average, SAT scores, freshman grade point average, and quarter hours attempted.

Louisiana colleges report group information for individual high schools to the local districts; included are ACT composite scores, the numbers of students enrolled in developmental courses by subject area (mathematics, English, reading, and study skills), and the numbers of developmental and non-developmental students "in good standing" at the end of the fall term. The colleges also provide the reports to the State Department of Education so that summary reports can be compiled.

"The idea of reporting to high schools on student readiness for college is straightforward—in fact, relatively simple."

The University of Tennessee system is currently developing a reporting program for its three campuses. Each University of Tennessee institution will report group data to the high schools on college performance in English and mathematics as well as systemwide data for comparisons; individual student information will not be available. The levels of courses taken, such as advanced or developmental, will also be reported.

Both **Texas and North Carolina** are developing college-readiness reporting programs. While the details have yet to be worked out, the law passed by the **Texas** legislature in 1987

"...high schools and colleges may 'go through the motions' but not be committed to using the results of college-readiness reports."

requires the Higher Education Coordinating Board to adopt institutional guidelines for reporting placement and performance information to high schools. The law also specifies that safeguards be included to protect student privacy. The placement program, effective in the fall of 1989, will require freshmen and transfer students to attain a minimum score on state-adopted reading, writing, and mathematics tests—those students whose scores fall short will be referred to remedial courses. **North Carolina** is in the early stages of organizing its program, which was initiated by the president of the University of North Carolina.

Problems in Making College-Readiness Reporting Programs Work

Several problems have detracted from the effectiveness of the college-readiness reporting programs, but states are beginning to deal with them. In Florida, for instance, staff from both the Department of Education and the state Senate conducted surveys to identify problems in the program. For example, the law requires individual institutions to report. State officials found that there was no coordination among the 37 public community colleges and universities. School districts were receiving different kinds of reports from each college—reports that often lacked common data elements, had varying formats, and few, if any, directions for the use of the information. Districts were receiving the reports throughout the year rather than during a concise period of time. Student identification was a problem because the school districts and colleges do not use common student identification numbers. Additionally, larger districts found it impossible to use individual student data without summary information. The State Department of Education, the Board of Regents, and the State Board of Community Colleges are now working to correct these problems.

"...college-readiness reporting programs...should not be viewed as a way to determine 'good or bad' schools."

Procedures that may need review have surfaced in other SREB states. Georgia and Louisiana both report on *all* entering freshmen, regardless of when they graduated from high school. Because of increasing numbers of older students entering college, the group data may not relate to the current high school programs. In Tennessee, the Board of Regents' institutions report on the placement of students within that system alone. School districts cannot get a comprehensive picture of all freshmen because the University of Tennessee system has not yet begun reporting. The University of Tennessee system is testing its reporting process this spring; however, its information will not be comparable to that of the Board of Regents.

Other common issues seem to hinder these programs. There appears to be a lack of communication between higher education and the public schools. In a number of states, higher education boards were required to develop reporting programs and they did so with little or no input from state departments of education or from the school districts that would be receiving and using the information. Some programs appear to have been implemented with a lack of planning and with just enough effort to comply with the established policy. Once reports are distributed, there is little contact between higher education and public schools—which is, after all, what the programs are about. Higher education institutions and state boards rarely follow up with the public schools. While districts claim that the information

received is often not useful or timely, higher education boards seldom hear from the schools about the reports.

Some of the information provided is not descriptive enough to be useful in improving student preparation. Because the information is too general and/or incomplete, it is impossible to determine what program (college preparatory, general, or vocational) the students pursued in high school. Summary information alone, without designating the types or levels of collegiate courses attempted, is of little value, as are massive quantities of individual data without summary reports, particularly for large districts.

What Does It Take to Make a College-Readiness Reporting Program Work?

Having reviewed the programs in SREB states and the problems encountered in implementing them, the following observations and recommendations are made to assist in the development of successful college-readiness reporting programs:

- Accurate and useful data must be provided in a manageable form and in a timely manner.
- Strong joint leadership and direction are important. Schools *and* colleges must determine cooperatively what should be reported, how it should be reported, and when it should be reported.
- A system for follow-up and evaluation should be jointly developed to assure that the program's goals are being met and that changes, if needed, can be agreed on and adopted.
- While information on how students perform in their first year in college does reflect high school preparation, it is more difficult to use in identifying specific areas of strengths and weaknesses. There is greater potential for college-readiness reporting programs in states where placement assessments measure reading, writing, and mathematics skills of entering college students.
- College-readiness reporting programs are intended to help high school students get ready for college. They should not be viewed as a way to determine "good or bad" schools. There will be positive and negative publicity on the information reported, but this is a reasonable price to pay for better prepared college students.

This edition of *Regional Spotlight* was prepared by Gale F. Gaines, SREB Research Associate, and Mark D. Musick, Vice President and Director, State Services and Information.

A Successful College-Readiness Reporting Program Involves:

— cooperation of state-level and local education agencies in planning, implementation, and evaluation;

— state-level coordination of the reporting process;

— an assessment program to determine the skills of students entering college;

— a common reporting format(s), to be used by all colleges and universities within a state, that provides both detailed and summary information;

— a reporting schedule that would allow high schools to receive the information on their graduates from all colleges during a concise time period;

— the designation of students either by age or by high school graduation date and the program they completed in high school (college preparatory, general, or vocational);

— assistance to the high schools in interpreting and using the information provided;

— bringing school and college faculty together to review college-readiness results and determine what actions are suggested by the results.

For Further Information

The Southern Regional Education Board has released a number of publications dealing with educational improvements and college placement, remediation, and student preparation. Copies of the following are available from SREB:

Access to Quality Undergraduate Education ($3.50)

"College-Level Study: What Is It?" *Issues in Higher Education* (Multiple copies: 50¢)

Getting Students Ready for College ($4.00)

Improving Student Preparation: Higher Education and the Schools Working Together ($4.00)

A Progress Report and Recommendations on Educational Improvements in the SREB States ($6.50)

Readiness for College: Should There Be Statewide Placement Standards? ($4.00)

"Unprepared College Students: High Schools and Colleges Respond" (Multiple copies: 50¢)

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